

# DAGENHAM LET WANDERERS OFF LIGHTLY

LAST season, Wycombe Wanderers lost only three of their 42 Rothmans Isthmian League matches. On Saturday, they crashed to their third in 10 games when they went down at Dagenham to a fifth minute goal by full back Paul Currie.

And although Wycombe have been a little unfortunate in some of their encounters this term, they could have no excuses at Victoria Road. They were beaten by a better side and were lucky not to come away with a heavier defeat. To make matters worse, Blues centre back Keith Mead was booked in the second half for shirt pulling — only Wycombe's third booking in three seasons.

Once again I have to report Wanderers' problems started in the front line. Their forwards were totally dominated by Dagenham's six-foot-plus back four and as the match wore on, midfield also deteriorated and consequently the defence, under a good deal of pressure throughout, also looked suspect.

There were the occasional moves of real brilliance from Wanderers, first time passing of rare accuracy baffling the home side. But more often than not, the Blues lost possession and were subjected to stern pressure.

One of the main differences between two attacking sides on Saturday was Dagenham's ability to penetrate. They stretched Wycombe's defence to the limit with long raking passes to either flank and had the home strikers been on target, Wanderers could have found themselves four down by the close.

Wycombe themselves also created a number of goalscoring attempts and yet there were few clear cut opportunities and goalkeeper Ian Huttley was seldom tested. Too often the front men were bundled off the ball and easily dispossessed while the distribution from both defence and midfield was well below par.

Only John Maskell, although slightly at fault with the goal, could feel pleased with his performance. He pulled off some fine saves throughout the 90 minutes and gave his usual consistent display between the posts. Dave Bullock, who came in for injured skipper John Delaney, was as brave as ever but both Mead and Ray Eaton had games they will want to forget. Up front, Tony Horseman was rarely seen and failed to make any impact while Dylan Evans' inconsistency must have been frustrating for his colleagues at times.

was this player who looked most likely to succeed. On this occasion he picked up the ball in midfield and burst past three defenders before playing a one-two with Geoff Anthony. Mick's parting shot lacked power but

yards. Then Bullock, Eaton and Maskell all hesitated inside the penalty area as Harkins raced in. Easton's eventual back pass being pushed away by the 'keeper for another corner.

What the Blues really needed

ed back John Dear by the shirt when the centre forward threatened to break clear and Mr. McCowan had no hesitation taking his name. I regard this official as one of the best on the Isthmian circuit and the booking

Maskell robbed them of another goal in the 88th minute. Harkins, who hit 37 league goals last season, let go with a rocket of a shot from 25 yards and Maskell somehow arched back and managed to push the ball over the top.

Ironically, Wanderers might have snatched a share of the points in the last minute. Dave Alexander, who replaced Anthony, sent over a perfect cross from the right and no-one spotted Tommy James moving into the box. James launched himself full length and sent a header skidding just past the post.

This was a repeat of last season's reverse, although in totally different conditions. Wanderers can have no complaints about it either. There is still much work to be done in the Blues camp if they are to make any impact this season.

**DAGENHAM:** I. Huttley; J. Dunwell, N. Welch, D. Moore, P. Currie, M. Springett, J. Holder, J. Borland, M. Harkins, J. Dear (sub R. Harris 85 mins.), K. Gray.

**WYCOMBE:** J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Bullock, R. Eaton, T. James, T. Reardon, M. Holifield, A. Horseman, D. Evans, G. Anthony (sub D. Alexander 80 mins.).

**Referee:** V. McCowan (London).

**Half-time:** 1-0. **Goalscorer:** Dagenham — Currie (5).

## By STUART EARP Dagenham 1, Wycombe Wanderers 0

Huttley had to push the ball away for a corner.

For a time Wanderers held their own but it was clearly visible that Dagenham were the more aggressive side and only Maskell halted another goal after 24 minutes when he blocked Mai Markins' drive and then saw veteran Ken Gray screw the return wide of the mark. Nine minutes later another electrifying burst from Holifield carved out a chance for Evans but his well placed shot was smartly saved by Huttley.

Wycombe had the wind and sun in their faces for the second half and in the first five minutes they could have found themselves three down. Firstly Holder blasted a shot into Maskell's midriff and then Gray wasted another chance when lifting the ball over from six

was someone to take a grip of the game and get them into some sort of rhythm. But nobody, either in midfield or up front, was able to settle and as a result, they were forced to back-peddle constantly.

There were the odd few moments when Wycombe did manage to trouble the home side. Evans once broke through and slipped Norman Welch inside the box but again Huttley was well positioned and then Anthony sprinted clear on the left but the 'keeper cut out his chip to the unmarked Holifield. At this stage, the Daggers had gone off the boil and had lost the initiative. But Wanderers were unable to take advantage of this situation and the pressure slowly started again.

In the 81st minute Mead went into the referee's book. He pull-

was correct. What is distressing, however, and is a constant criticism levelled at referees these days is inconsistency. I have seen Mead get away with this offence before without even a word spoken to him. Also, later in Saturday's game Welch stopped a Wycombe attack by deliberately handballing. He got away with it, Mead didn't.

Mead's booking was Wycombe's third in three seasons and means they will receive less from the sportsmanship pool at the end of the term. The other players booked in the last two seasons were Bullock (shirt pulling) and Reardon (handball).

For the last five minutes Wanderers looked a well beaten side. The heads went down as Dagenham pressed forward and only a magnificent save by

Wanderers started well enough, finding each other with neat passes although never getting near enough to the penalty area to worry Dagenham. On their first real venture into Wycombe territory, the home side went ahead. As the ball came across from the right, Bullock was dispossessed after falling and the ball came out of a ruck of players to Currie on the edge of the box. Taking a couple of steps forward, the left back rammed a low shot under Maskell's body and into the net. It was Currie's first goal of the season and one which his brother Tony, playing just down the road at West Ham, would have been pleased to emulate.

Wycombe replied almost immediately with one of their best raids of the game. The man who made it was Mick Holifield and if Wycombe were to score, it